

# A New Year: A Time to Remember God's Grace



**Thrust Statement:** **Remembering God's grace brings about a change in one's lifestyle.**

**Scripture Reading:** **2 Corinthians 13:5**

As one approaches this New Year, this is a time to reexamine one's relationship to God. Paul's message, as found in **2 Corinthians 13:5**, is designed to invite individuals to look into their hearts and to search themselves so that they may discover what is in their hearts. The year 2004 is a time for reflection on God's calling individuals away from themselves and for evaluation of one's self-preoccupation with one's own interests. Hopefully, an examination of this text will encourage Christians to focus on two things: (1) self-examination of one's daily walk with God, and (2) reflection upon God's grace in and through His Son Jesus.

Just a casual glance at Paul's words in this passage penetrates into the very soul of any individual who reaches out to God for salvation. Paul goes right to the very center of one's own ego and says: "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test" (**2 Corinthians 13:5**)? <sup>[1]</sup> This text, at first glance, seems to draw one away from the doctrine of justification by faith. This self-examination is concerned about glorifying God as a result of His grace extended to those who focus their attention upon Christ for deliverance from God's wrath.

Apparently, some of the Corinthians had failed to understand the implications of this message of God's Way of salvation by grace in and through Christ. A brief reading of this epistle reveals that some failed to allow a fundamental change in their day-to-day behavior, a change that the Gospel demands. In this brief verse, Paul desires that God's people should apprehend Jesus Christ, but, at the same time, he also wishes that God's Gospel should take into custody everyone's life to His glory and honor through good works. Emil Brunner comments on **2 Corinthians 13:5** this way:

Christ is indeed the theme of this text too. This self-examination is concerned with faith, of course with faith in the grace of God which alone saves us, and its object is to discover whether we have truly understood this preaching and made this message the fundamental inspiration of our lives.<sup>[2]</sup>

Do you realize that Christ Jesus is in you? Who is Christ? What is His identity? The Holy Spirit wants the disciples of Jesus Christ to testify as to His identity—the Savior of the world (**John 15:26-27**). How does faith come about? Faith in Jesus comes about through the proclamation of the Gospel (**Romans 10:14-17**). Jesus Christ longs to dwell in the hearts of His people, not just their minds or memories (**Revelation 3:20**). An examination of one's faith should result in amazement and marvel at the rich love of God in sending His Son to die for sinful humanity. As you reflect upon God's mercy, are you spellbound in wonder and struck with astonishment and driven to bow in worship to His matchless love? Jesus invites everyone to open his or her heart and let Him in. Have you failed to devote your life to Jesus? Have you examined your life? Have you failed the test?

What is your faith all about? What does your belief amount to? Does your belief in Christ make a difference in your life? Is your life the same today as it was before you put your faith in Him? Can you say that you are a different person as a result of you're faith? Does your faith issue forth in gratitude for His redemption (**Colossians 3:16**)? Is your faith very deep? Are you aware that there is One above you? Do you allow God's Word to speak to you today? Do you remember God's grace through Jesus Christ? Paul writes to Timothy to remember Jesus Christ:

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel,<sup>9</sup> for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained.<sup>10</sup> Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory (**2 Timothy 2:8-10**).

Do you reflect upon the deepest foundations of your faith? Why does God's love no longer radiate from your face? Why is there so little warmth toward God's people? Why did Paul write as he did to the Corinthians? Are you praying that this verse (**2 Corinthians 13:5**) will sink into your heart and stand fast? Remember, that Jesus Christ is given to those who believe as "righteousness" from God (**1 Corinthians 1:30**). If one wishes to exemplify Christ in his or her daily walk with God, one must wrap himself or herself in the grace of God in Jesus Christ. When one allows himself or herself to be taken into God's New Covenant, one must remain loyal to it. When one is without Christ, one is in darkness. When one is with Christ, one is in light. If awe for God dies, you die. Is your faith very deep? Is your faith simply lodged in your understanding and not in your heart?

As you approach this New Year, is there meaning to your life? Is there anything worthwhile in your life? Today, the world is full of individuals to whom there is no meaning in life? When one discovers that his or her life is a vacuum, one does not know God. When one does not know God, there is no eternal purpose by which one can shape his or her life. One simply drifts in the sea of nothingness. When one's life is oriented toward the Eternal, when one's thoughts are upon the kingdom of God, when one's life is committed to Jesus, and when one's life is filled with assurance of salvation, then one's faith is able to overcome the philosophy of despair. When one's life is filled with God, one

does not need to turn to alcohol, one does not need to turn to drugs, and one does not need to turn to illicit sex. Yes, when one knows God, one knows that his or her journey is not void; one knows the goal set before him or her—eternal life in and through Jesus.

When the hope of eternal life fades, one's sense of the holy and one's sense of awe disappears. Without a belief in the following words of Jesus, one sinks into despair: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies" (**John 11:25**). When one affirms that he or she believes in the resurrection of the dead and of life in the world to come, one does not melt away into emptiness. Life has importance and substance. When one knows Christ and the power of His resurrection, one never looks at the world as he or she did before meeting Christ. Listen to Paul as he seeks to capture the true meaning of life:

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.<sup>8</sup> What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ<sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.<sup>10</sup> I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,<sup>11</sup> and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead (**Philippians 3:7-11**).

A belief in the resurrection of Jesus results in one becoming what Christ is. Is Christ formed in you? Paul calls attention to the necessity of allowing Christ to mold one's life: "My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you,<sup>20</sup> how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you" (**Galatians 4:19-20**)! Are you living in Christ and is Christ living in you? To live in Christ is to live in eternity. God from eternity predetermined that those who receive the Son of God receive eternal life (**Ephesians 1:3-14**). If one wishes to receive eternal life, one must know the Son who is from eternity (**John 3:36**).

What does it mean to you to say, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection"? Did Paul just want intellectual knowledge about Christ, or did he want an intimate knowledge of Christ? Paul did not just want to know about Christ, but rather he wanted to personally know Him? What about yourself? Do you want to know about Him or know Him? William Barclay captures the essence of what it really means to know Him:

To know Christ is not to be skilled in any theoretical or theological knowledge; it is to know him with such intimacy that in the end we are as united with him as we are with those whom we love on earth and that, as we share their experiences, so we also share his.<sup>[3]</sup>

What does God's grace mean to you? Has God's grace had an effect upon your lifestyle? God's grace is seen in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. It is through the resurrection of Jesus that one knows that he or she has eternal life and has access to it. One can say with confidence than one can have hope of eternal life in and through Jesus. One must die with Christ the Crucified One, and you must be resurrected with Christ the

resurrected One. God, in His wisdom, designed the means whereby sinful humanity can participate in the death, burial, and resurrection of His Son. Günther Bornkamm explains baptism this way:

In that Christ takes his own into his death and his life, he thus places them together with him in this activity. He separates them from sin and gives to their life out of death a constant direction toward God. Already in Rom. 5:1ff. Paul has shown how the believers are now initially activated through justification and the pact of peace: the Spirit moves their hearts through the love of God, which is poured into our hearts (5:5). And then comes the praise of hope, indeed praise not only in the middle of trouble but even because of affliction. This new activity means “endurance”—“character”—“hope” (Rom 5:4). “I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own!” (Phil. 3:12). “Dead to sin, alive to God”—that is no attained condition but the release of life, and now genuine activity for the first time. Paul makes this clear in Rom. 6:15ff. By describing liberation from sin not only as separation from its power but immediately as incorporation in a new relationship of obedience, as a service in the new being of the Spirit (7:6). The new conduct is thus already included with the new being; it is the release of a life open to God, now truly turned toward the future for the first time.<sup>[4]</sup>

Paul expresses this participation in **Romans 6** as he reminds the Romans of their baptism (**Romans 6:1-14**). If one believes in Him, this belief demands repentance, or conversion, from the old nature to a new person in Christ. Have you discarded the works of the flesh? In other words, have you disrobed yourself of the willful, self-seeking, prideful, and godless behavior of your former way of life? When one repents, the old person must die. Your old will and desires must die. Your pride must be destroyed. In Christian baptism, Jesus takes one who believes into His death and life. When one is buried with His Lord in baptism, one is dead to sin, but alive to God. In baptism, God has opened a new life. As one reflects upon baptism, one comes away with the idea that baptism represents a turning point between sin and God and between the old and the new aeon (age). What does it mean to you to say, “I believe in Jesus Christ”? Paul grabs hold of the very essence of one’s new life in Christ with its implications to the Romans:

What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! <sup>16</sup> Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? <sup>17</sup> But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. <sup>18</sup> You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness (**Romans 6:15-18**).

## CONCLUSION

When God calls men and women as partners into His kingdom, He desires their co-operation in the whole range of human activity (**Romans 12:1-2**). Christians are not made for freedom *from* God, but for freedom *in* God. This new allegiance renders one trustworthy and responsible and free—free to serve righteousness, not sin. In Christ, one is no longer his or her own master. Paul drives home this point in the first part of his first letter to Corinth: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is

in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own;<sup>20</sup> you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body” (**1 Corinthians 6:19-20**). Christians bow in awe at God’s forgiveness of sins.

Even though outsiders may not fully understand forgiveness, every Christian thanks God daily for forgiveness. All believers thank God for His intervention to bring about salvation in and through His Son. It is in this vein that Paul recounts the very essence of God’s Good News about salvation for sinful humanity:

It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, as it is written: “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord”<sup>b</sup> (**1:30-31**).

This challenge of self-examination by Paul in **2 Corinthians 13:5** takes one back to the very heart of his message of salvation in and through Christ. The Gospel of Jesus offers hope. The Gospel of Christ alone offers hope of eternal life. But it offers eternal life at a price—belief in Jesus as Lord. It is self-evident that death is the end of one’s physical life, but, at the same time, one can say that there is hope beyond the grave. In other words, the Gospel of Jesus extends a hope greater than anything that this world has to offer. To escape God’s wrath, one must accept and confess Jesus as Lord. Listen to Paul, once more, as he goes right to the heart of salvation:

But what does it say? “The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,”<sup>e</sup> that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming:<sup>9</sup> That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.<sup>10</sup> For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.<sup>11</sup> As the Scripture says, “Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame”<sup>f</sup> (**Romans 10:8-11**).

Do you want to be one of His disciples? Do you want to renounce your own rights and will? If you are willing to do that, you can know for sure that Jesus is your resurrection and life. Again, the words of Jesus: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies” (**John 11:25**). Christians are conscious of this truth. As a result of this understanding, they have a purpose by which life can be shaped. Believers know why they are in the world, and they also know that they are not journeying into a void of meaninglessness.

Christians know that they are to love God and their neighbors. This kind of mindset is woven into the very texture of one’s everyday walk with God. When one believes in God, the Father of Jesus Christ, one knows that his or her life is not governed by chance, but by the will of God. J. H. Oldham quotes the following succinct observation about the new life in Christ from Archbishop of York:

In Christ new life broke into the world; He is the beginning and the pledge of its redemption. The church, the company of those who believe in Him, is the salt of the earth, a new leaven working in the world and history, seeking to permeate these realms and renew them by the power of the new life. The Christian

dividing line does not run between the sphere of religion and the sphere of the secular. In the heart and center of the common life of the world it divides those who live this common life in the power of faith, seeking to transform and renew it from the roots up, and those who live and act in unbelief, that is in self-centeredness and pride. . . . The destiny of the Church, the deepest secret of its life, is to die continually in the redemptive service of the world and to rise again in a reborn natural and historical—that is to say, secular—life.<sup>[5]</sup>

Do you really and truly believe? If so, then you will not drift like lost souls. If you believe, your soul is anchored in His love—the One who controls the world. Can you say the following words of Paul: “If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord” (**Romans 14:8**)? Do you remember God’s grace in your daily life? How is one saved? Is it by works or by grace? Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, writes:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (**Ephesians 2:8-10**).

In conclusion, as one sums up this message about remembering God’s grace, one must ask himself or herself if it is worthwhile to believe? This message about remembering God’s grace has labored the point that it is only in faith that life takes on real value and authentic meaning to assist one through the toils of life. Faith in Jesus is the only consolation that one finds in life as well as in death. Are you in the faith? Have you examined your faith? Is it active or is it dead? Pay attention once more to the words of Paul:

Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test? <sup>6</sup> And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test. <sup>7</sup> Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong. Not that people will see that we have stood the test but that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed. <sup>8</sup> For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. <sup>9</sup> We are glad whenever we are weak but you are strong; and our prayer is for your perfection. <sup>10</sup> This is why I write these things when I am absent, that when I come I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority—the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down (**2 Corinthians 13:5-10**).

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<sup>[1]</sup>All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984), unless stated otherwise.

<sup>[2]</sup> Emil Brunner, “Self-examination: 2 Corinthians 13:5” in *The Great Invitation and Other Sermons* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1955), 165-66. I am indebted to Emil Brunner for the genesis of this message: A New Year: Remembering God’s Grace.

<sup>[3]</sup> William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, The Daily study Bible series, Rev. ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), 64-65.

<sup>[4]</sup> Günther Bornkamm, *Early Christian Experience* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1969), 80.

b Jer. 9:24

e Deut. 30:14

f Isaiah 28:16

<sup>[5]</sup> J. H. Oldham, *Life Is Commitment* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1952), 90.